

Message Text

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SUBJECT: TEXT OF HEDRICK SMITH ARTICLE "AFTER PANAMA,
MORE BATTLES, A CARTER WINNING STREAK DOES NOT APPEAR
LIKELY"

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF HEDRICK SMITH ARTICLE APPEARING IN
APRIL 20 NEW YORK TIMES.

BEGIN TEXT:

PRESIDENT CARTER'S LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN BOLSTERED A BIT
BY THE SENATE'S APPROVAL OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY
YESTERDAY. BUT HE HAS STILL NOT ACHIEVED THE KIND OF
BREAKTHROUGH THAT WILL STIMULATE POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR
HIS OTHER MAJOR OBJECTIVES SUCH AS AN ARMS AGREEMENT WITH
THE RUSSIANS.

IN THE FACE OF CONTINUING INDIFFERENCE IN THE PUBLIC
OPINION POLLS, INCREASING IRREVERENCE TOWARD MR. CARTER
AMONG WASHINGTON POLITICIANS, AND EVIDENT UNEASINESS IN
EUROPE ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HIS LEADERSHIP, THE
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SENATE VOTE WAS A TRIUMPH SOREL NEEDED TO COUNTERACT
HIS GROWING IMAGE AS A LOSER.

'GOOD TO WIN A BIG ONE'

AND GIVEN THE LOPSIDED ANTITREATY SENTIMENT IN PUBLIC
OPINION POLLS LAST FALL AND THE WELL-ORGANIZED OPPOSITION

OF POLITICAL CONSERVATIVES IN THE SENATE, THE SLENDER VICTORY REPRESENTED A VALUABLE RETURN FOR MR. CARTER'S PERSONAL POLITICKING WITH A HANDFUL OF SWING SENATORS, AND AN IMPRESSIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR THE GRASS-ROOTS CAMPAIGN ORGANIZED BY HIS POLITICAL AIDE, HAMILTON JORDAN.

AS JODY POWELL, HIS PRESS SECRETARY REMARKED, "THIS TIME LAST YEAR YOU COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN ANYONE TO GIVE YOU A DOLLAR AGAINST A DOUGHNUT THAT WE WOULD HAVE GOTTEN ANY KIND OF PANAMA CANAL TREATY RATIFIED."

"I'M NOT CLAIMING THAT THIS IS THE BE-ALL AND END-ALL," MR. POWELL CONCEDED, "BUT IT'S GOOD TO WIN ONE, AND A BIG ONE. WE LEARNED A LOT IN WORKING ON AN EFFORT THAT REALLY TURNED THE COUNTRY AROUND IN THREE OR FOUR MONTHS. WE GOT TWO-THIRDS -- MORE THAN TWO THIRDS -- OF THE SOUTHERN DEMOCRATS WITH US. I DON'T THINK THAT IN MODERN HISTORY THAT THERE WAS ANY OTHER FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE THAT WAS QUITE AS TOUGH AS THIS."

BUT WHATEVER THE HELP TO THE ADMINISTRATION'S MORALE, THIS WAS NOT THE KIND OF VICTORY THAT WILL PROVIDE LONG-TERM POLITICAL MOMENTUM OR PRODUCE MUCH SPILLOVER FOR THE ADMINISTRATION IN CONGRESS ON SUCH OTHER KEY ISSUES AS STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL, THE MIDDLE EAST ARMS PACKAGE

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OR DOMESTIC MATTERS LIKE TAX REFORM, THE URBAN PROGRAM, WELFARE REFORM OR THE PRESIDENT'S BATTLE AGAINST COLLEGE-TUITION TAX CREDITS.

"THE PANAMA VOTE IS HELPFUL BUT IN NO WAY DOES IT OPEN THE GATES OF HEAVEN FOR THE PRESIDENT UP HERE," SAID ONE DEMOCRATIC LEADER IN CONGRESS. "IN THE PAST 10 DAYS I'VE PICKED UP MORE CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT AND MORE SENSE OF MALAISE THAN AT ANY OTHER TIME. THE MAIN THING ABOUT THE PANAMA VOTE IS THAT IT IS DAMAGE LIMITATION. IT PROTECTED THE PRESIDENT FROM DISASTROUS DEFEAT.

ISSUE OF AN ARMS TREATY

IN PART, THE LIMITED IMPACT OF THE PANAMA VICTORY IS A MATTER OF THE PRESIDENT'S OWN STYLE. HE HIMSELF TAKES

ISSUES ONE BY ONE, AND THUS A VICTORY IN ONE AREA DOES NOT BUILD A BASE FOR VICTORY IN ANOTHER. IN THIS CASE, THE WHITE HOUSE WAS UNABLE TO CONVERT ITS LOBBYING ON THE PANAMA ISSUE INTO A SOLID, LOYAL BLOC OF FOLLOWERS

IN THE SENATE. MR. CARTER'S FINAL BARGAINING WITH A FEW INDIVIDUAL SENATORS IS NOT THE KIND OF TACTIC THAT BUILDS BLOC SUPPORT.

NONETHELESS, SINCE THE TURN OF THE YEAR, SOME HIGH-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS HAVE CONTENDED THAT A VICTORY ON PANAMA WOULD HAVE A LONG-RANGE PAYOFF IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. SPECIFICALLY, THEY HAD MAINTAINED THAT IT WOULD EASE THE WAY FOR SENATE APPROVAL OF A STRATEGIC ARMS TREATY WITH THE RUSSIANS, AND THERE WERE STILL A FEW PRO-ADMINISTRATION SENATORS MAKING THAT ARGUMENT TODAY.

BUT THE PREVAILING VIEW WAS THAT A NUMBER OF CONSERVATIVES HAD GONE ALONG WITH MR. CARTER ON THE PANAMA TREATIES
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BUT COULD NOT BE LURED INTO HIS CAMP TWICE IN ONE YEAR ON THE LIBERAL SIDE OF CONTROVERSIAL FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. THEREFORE, SOME KEY SENATORS PREDICTED THAT APPROVAL OF AN ARMS AGREEMENT THIS YEAR WOULD BE VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE.

"THE MESSAGE OF THIS VOTE IS THAT SALT IS IN REAL TROUBLE," CONTENDED SENATOR HENRY M. JACKSON, THE WASHINGTON DEMOCRAT, WHO HAS BEEN THE ADMINISTRATION'S PRINCIPAL FOE ON THE STRATEGIC ARMS LIMITATION TALKS BUT WHO WORKED IN FAVOR OF THE PANAMA TREATIES. "THERE'S A LONG LIST OF US WHO VOTED FOR THE PANAMA TREATIES WHO WILL VOTE AGAINST SALT, AT LEAST THE WAY THEY ARE PRESENTING IT NOW."

GIVEN THE NARROW MARGIN OF THE PANAMA VICTORY, THE DEFEC- TION OF ANY ONE OF A NUMBER OF DEMOCRATS, LIKE SENATOR JACKSON, DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN OF NEW YORK, SAM NUNN AND HERMAN E. TALMADGE OF GEORGIA, OR HOWARD W. CANNON OF NEVADA, WOULD JEOPARDIZE AN ARMS CONTROL TREATY.

EVEN MORE CRUCIAL IS THE LIKELY EROSION OF BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR AN ARMS AGREEMENT. ON THE PANAMA ISSUE, THE ADMINISTRATION PROFITED HANDSOMELY FROM THE ACTIVE SUPPORT NOT ONLY OF SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD OF WEST VIRGINIA, THE MAJORITY LEADER, BUT ALSO OF SENATOR HOWARD H. BAKER JR. OF TENNESSEE, THE MINORITY LEADER, AND, TO A SMALLER DEGREE, TED STEVENS, THE REPUBLICAN WHIP FROM ALASKA. ON ARMS, BOTH OF THESE INFLUENTIAL REPUBLICANS ARE NOW DOUBTFUL.

'SORE AT THE ADMINISTRATION'

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SOMEWHAT DEFENSIVELY, SOME PRESIDENTIAL AIDES CONTEND THAT BECAUSE OF A SOUR MOOD IN THE NEWS MEDIA AND IN CONGRESS, PRESIDENT CARTER "IS NOT GOING TO GET THE CREDIT HE DESERVES" NO MATTER HOW SUCCESSFUL HE WAS IN PANAMA. HE BENEFITED ONLY MODESTLY, THEY NOTE, FROM THE COAL SETTLEMENT THAT HIS INTERVENTION INDUCED OR EVEN FROM THE DEFEAT OF THE FARM BILL IN THE HOUSE LAST WEEK, IN THE FACE OF HIS THREATENED VETO.

THERE IS AN ECHO OF THESE SENTIMENTS ON CAPITOL HILL. EVEN PRO-ADMINISTRATION SENATORS CONCEDE THAT "PEOPLE ARE PRETTY SORE AT THE ADMINISTRATION" FOR OVERLOADING CONGRESS WITH INITIATIVES, SPEAKING WITH CONFLICTING VOICES ON POLICY ISSUES, AND FOR GENERAL DISORGANIZATION. AS MORE THAN ONE SENATOR PUT IT, A SINGLE VICTORY ON THE PANAMA QUESTION, HOWEVER IMPORTANT, IS NOT ENOUGH TO CURE THIS MALAISE. A QUICK FOLLOW-UP VICTORY ON ENERGY, SOME SUGGESTED, WOULD PROVIDE MOMENTUM. BUT HARDLY ANYONE IN CONGRESS REGARDS THAT AS LIKELY.

SO CANTANKEROUS AND INDEPENDENT-MINDED IS CONGRESS THAT EACH ISSUE IS HANDLED SEPARATELY, MAKING IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR MR. CARTER TO PUT TOGETHER A STRING OF VICTORIES. "YOU HAVE TO WORK FOR EACH ONE SEPARATELY," REMARKED ROBERT N. GAIMO, THE CONNECTICUT DEMOCRAT WHO HEADS THE HOUSE BUDGET COMMITTEE.

END TEXT.
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